LATIN III – OVERLY DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF “CUM CLAUSES”

CUM AS A SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTION

You're already well-acquainted with the preposition "cum" + ablative case, meaning "with". There is also a word "cum" which is not a preposition at all, but a subordinating conjunction. Even though "cum" the conjunction looks exactly like "cum" the preposition, the two words actually have different histories. They are not the same word at all. The difficulty with translating the conjunction "cum" is that it has a wide variety of meanings and can take either the indicative or the subjunctive mood in its clause.

Even though we can distinguish some broad classes of meanings, it is still difficult sometimes to tell just which one of them "cum" is using in a given sentence, and therefore which of our several English conjunctions will best translate it. In this respect, "cum" is similar to our conjunction "as", which has quite a range of meanings, and at times seems to be using many of them all at once. For example,

"As I was coming in the door, I saw my friend."

Does this sentence mean "I saw my friend because I was coming in the door" or does it mean "I saw my friend while I was coming in the door." It's hard to say, and in fact both could be true at the same time. For if I hadn't been coming in the door at that time I wouldn't have seen my friend. This same kind of fusion of meanings exists for the conjunction "cum", so it will take some sensitivity to the context for you to come up with an accurate translation for "cum".

There are two categories of meanings for "cum": (a) strictly temporal (when); (b) circumstantial (as, whereas, since, because, although).

When "cum" is temporal, the mood of the verb in its clause is often indicative. It is almost always indicative when the tense of the verb in the main clause is present or future tense.

When the tense of the main verb is one of the past tenses, then the mood of the "cum" clause is most often subjunctive.

But when the "cum" clause is circumstantial, then the mood of its verb is always subjunctive. A circumstantial "cum" clause can be translated as "since", "because", and "although".

This may seem odd, because "although" indicates that there is an incompatibility between the subordinate and main clauses -- that given the circumstances of the subordinate clause, the event in the main should not take place. We call a clause like this "concessive".

"Because" and "since", however, indicate a direct causal link between the subordinate and main clauses. How can the same subordinating conjunction denote two such disparate relations? And how will you know which is being represented in a given "cum" clause?

The answer to the first question isn't easy, but perhaps it will help to remember that a "cum" clause is generally circumstantial -- it merely sets a backdrop for the the action in the main clause -- without spelling out what the relationship is between them.

You've already seen in participles and ablative absolute constructions that Latin tends to be much less insistent about specifying the exact logical or temporal relationship between subordinate and main elements in its sentences. The answer to the second question is that you must rely on context to tell you which of the relationships is the more plausible. That is, admittedly, somewhat unsatisfactory, but often that is all we'll have to go by.

Very often, however, Latin will help the reader along by inserting a "tamen" or some other such word in the main clause if the "cum" clause is meant to be taken as concessive.

Obviously there's more here than you really need to know to get started with "cum" clauses -- and there is still more you'll have to know to read Latin at advanced levels. For your needs, at your stage in Latin, you should know that "cum" clauses are either temporal or circumstantial, have a range of possible meanings which you must consider, and may take the indicative or the subjunctive mood. But when it does employ the subjunctive mood, "cum" clauses must observe the sequence of tenses, which govern the tenses of subordinate subjunctives.
Let's look at several examples of the different "cum" clauses.

(a) "Cum responderit [fut. perf.], omnia intellegéritis".

This "cum" clause is temporal, and because the subjunctive isn't being used, the sequence of tenses doesn't apply.

Translate: "When he answers (will have answered), you will understand everything".

(b) "Cum respondisset, omnia intellexistis".

Now the "cum" clause is subjunctive, so we have to bring in the rules governing the tenses of subordinate subjunctives. Since the sentence is in secondary sequence because of the tense of the main verb, the pluperfect subjunctive in the "cum" clause shows time prior. Translate: "Because he had answered, you understood everything", or "When he had answered..". or "Since he had answered."

(c) "Cum respondisset, nón tamen intellexistis".

Here the "tamen" tells us that the "cum" clause is not causal or temporal but concessive. Translate: "Although he answered, you still (nevertheless) did not understand". CUM CONCESSIVE

(d) "Cum respondéret, nón aderátis". CUM CIRCUMSTANTIAL

In secondary sequence -- "ad + eratis" -- the imperfect subjunctive of the subordinate subjunctive "responderet" shows contemporaneous ("same") time. Translate: "When he was answering, you were not present".

(e) "Cum responderit, omnia iam intellegitis". CUM CAUSAL

In primary sequence the perfect subjunctive shows time prior "before") .

Translate: "Because he answered, you now understand everything".

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

EXERCISES

I. Write down: subjunctive, indicative, infinitive, imperative, participle? If not subjunctive, translate.

1. tulisse - 11. latúrum esse –
2. conferunt - 12. adferent –
3. refert - 13. transferte –
4. latus erás - 14. contulerim –
5. ferrí - 15. pereuntés milités –
6. rettulistí - 16. collátí sunt –
7. íbámus - 17. serví cénam latúrí –
8. feréris - 18. ferunt –
9. adferébam - 19. relátúrus sum –
10. oblátum erat - 20. fers –
II. Translate.

1. Cum miserrimí essent serví, tamen dominum semper laudábant.

2. Cum in exsilium missí símus, nullum auxilium nóbís datum est.

3. Cum apud hostés sítis, amící ad vós nave íbunt ut vós servent.


5. Cum haec verba díxisset, princeps copiás Rómánás ex castrís ad aciem duxit.

6. Cum amícitiam nóbís offerant, eís auxilium offerémus.

7. Cum exposuisset quid peteret, omnés cívés apud sé dícere incépérunt.

8. Cum plúrima dona pulchra deís tulissent, Tróiání hostés in proelió vícérunt.


10. Cum liberí intellegant qualis magistra sís, semper in scholá sunt optimí.